

Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch
Archdiocese for the Eastern United States

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PARISH BYLAWS



Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese for the Eastern United States

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Anyone who asks for this volume, to read, collate, or copy from it, and who appropriates it to himself or herself, or cuts anything out of it, should realize that (s)he will have to give answer before God's awesome tribunal as if (s)he had robbed a sanctuary. Let such a person be held anathema and receive no forgiveness until the book is returned. So be it, Amen! And anyone who removes these anathemas, digitally or otherwise, shall himself receive them in double.

*“Christ chose some of us to be apostles,
prophets, missionaries, pastors, and
teachers, so that His people would learn to
serve and His body would grow strong.”*

(Ephesians 4: 11-13)

”جَارَ مِنْ مَعَسَا اِنْفَعِ صَنَعِ وَتَهَّوَّ
مَكْتَسَا هَوْنًا هَمَّصَحْتَا هَوْحًا
هَمْتَفْتَا وَتَلَاكُ خُصَا وَنَكَا اُنْفِ رُومِ
وَبَعَثَا هَفِيَّهَ حَسْبَا رَمْنَا بَصْنَا“

اَهْمَتَا : م - م - م

FOREWORD

Apostolic Blessings and greetings to all the faithful who will be reading this booklet.

We are pleased to present to you this booklet which contains the recently amended parish bylaws of our beloved Archdiocese. These amendments were adopted at the 49th Annual Archdiocesan Convention, held in Washington DC on the 27th of July, 2012. His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius I Iwas, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, has signed and placed his seal approving this document on the 11th of September, 2012.

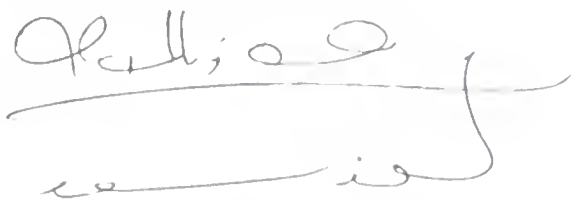
All churches, religious institutions and organizations have a set of clear rules and regulations by which they operate in order to maintain a healthy and smooth running process for all involved.

Our Archdiocese first adopted these bylaws at the Seventh Annual Convention, which met in Sherbrook, Quebec, Canada on the 2nd and 3rd of September, 1967. Since then, they have been amended twice, with this being the third.

These bylaws supersede any previously existing bylaws in any of the parishes. It is, therefore, our expectation that all those who are in the service of our Holy Church follow and abide by these amended bylaws as they pertain to every parish of the Archdiocese.

I ask the Almighty to bless those who diligently and tirelessly work to foster and protect our Holy Church. It is through your efforts and service that we can continue with our ministry providing the necessary spiritual guidance to all our parishioners of this Archdiocese.

Yours in the Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim
Archbishop

ARTICLE IV

SECTION 1. This Parish and its members shall not have the power to dissolve itself so long as the Holy See of Antioch exists.

SECTION 2. Neither this Church nor its properties shall be sold, alienated or encumbered without the consent of its congregation and the written approval of the Archbishop.

SECTION 3. All financial records, including annual budgets, are subject to inspection and audit by the Archbishop or his authorized representative.

ARTICLE V

Only baptized and confirmed persons who conform to the doctrine, discipline and worship of the Syriac Orthodox Church may be admitted to membership in the Church. The Priest shall present an applicant's name to the Archbishop and upon approval, the applicant shall be admitted into the membership of the Parish.

ARTICLE VI

SECTION 1. This Parish, under the direct supervision and administration of the Archbishop, shall have a Priest whose selection shall be determined in accordance with Article XIII, Section 1(b) of these Bylaws, and the installation and appointment of whom shall be made by the Archbishop.

SECTION 2. This Parish shall have a Parish Council, which shall consist of not less than seven nor more than twelve members elected by the congregation or appointed by the Archbishop, should an election not be feasible. The elected Parish Council is subject to the written approval of the Archbishop. Its principal duties shall be to administer the financial, administrative and social affairs of the Parish.

SECTION 3. (a) The term of the Parish Council shall be two years. The Archbishop, in his discretion, shall have the right to extend the term for two more years. In any event, no individual shall serve for more than 2 consecutive terms. (b) Upon the first election held under these Bylaws, the elected members shall, from among themselves, choose one-half who shall serve for one year and one-half who shall serve for two years. At each subsequent election, each member shall be elected for a full two-year term. (c) If a Parish is of such size that yearly elections would not be practical or feasible, it may, in writing, request an exemption from the Archbishop from the need to hold yearly elections.

SECTION 4. Members of the Parish Council shall elect from among themselves, by secret ballot, a president, vice president,

secretary and treasurer.

SECTION 5. The Archbishop shall have the power to dissolve the Parish Council and cause to be formed a new Parish Council (a) for compelling reasons, (b) if he receives a petition requesting dissolution signed by at least 75% of the voting members of the Parish in question, or (c) when he shall otherwise deem it to be in the best interests of the Church.

ARTICLE VII

SECTION 1. Any candidate for appointment or election to the Parish Council shall:

- (a) Be of the Syriac Orthodox faith;
- (b) Be of good moral character;
- (c) Be a member of this Church for at least two full years;
- (d) Be at least twenty-five (25) years of age;
- (e) Not be a member of any organization opposed to the Canons of the Universal Syriac Orthodox Church;
- (f) Know how to read, write and speak the English language;
- (g) Not be employed with any Archdiocesan or Parish organization; and
- (h) Have paid his/her annual membership dues for the last two consecutive years, in the year in which the dues are owing and, in an election year, no later than 30 days prior to the date of the election. For example, a candidate for the Parish Council cannot pay his membership dues for a preceding year or less than 30 days prior to the Council election for that year.

SECTION 2. A voter shall:

- (a) Be of the Syriac Orthodox faith;
- (b) Be a member of the Parish for at least two years;
- (c) Be at least eighteen (18) years of age;
- (d) Be of good moral character; and
- (e) Have paid his/her annual membership dues for the last two consecutive years, in the year in which the dues are owing and, in an election year, no later than 30 days prior to the date of the election. For example, a

candidate for the Parish Council cannot pay his membership dues for a preceding year or less than 30 days prior to the Council election for that year.

SECTION 3. If elections are held:

- (a) Parish Council elections shall be held on the third Sunday of November throughout the Archdiocese. Any request by a parish to hold its elections on a different date shall be submitted in writing to the Archbishop for his approval, with the specific reasons for the change request.
- (b) Candidates shall submit their candidacy in writing to the incumbent president or vice-president, who shall then issue an acknowledgement to this effect. The deadline for accepting requests for candidacy shall be 6 o'clock p.m. of the seventh day before Election Day. Within 24 hours thereafter, the list of candidates shall be submitted to the Archdiocese.
- (c) The names of eligible candidates shall be posted in a prominent place in the Church on the morning of the Sunday following the deadline day.
- (d) Any individual whose candidacy is rejected shall have the right to appeal to the Archbishop, in writing. The Archbishop's determination shall be final.
- (e) A committee of 3 members shall be formed by the Archbishop and the incumbent Parish Council to supervise the election process.
- (f) The election shall commence at the time and place designated, after the supervisory committee has opened the ballot box before the congregation to confirm its emptiness and has then resealed it. The election shall proceed until the designated time when termination of the casting of ballots shall be announced and counting shall begin.
- (g) The supervisory committee shall open the ballot box immediately after voting terminates, and shall confirm that the number of ballots is consistent with the number of actual eligible voters. The committee shall then count the votes aloud before the congregation.
- (h) A ballot must be marked with votes corresponding to the number of Parish Council positions to be filled. Any ballot containing less than the specified number of marks shall be deemed invalid. For example, if a ballot has 4 positions to be filled and only 2 names have been

checked, that ballot shall be considered null and void. A blank or an unreadable ballot shall be considered void.

- (i) Election results shall be announced immediately after the ballots have been counted. Candidates obtaining the highest counts for the total number of Parish Council positions to be filled shall be pronounced as the new Parish Council members. The rest of the candidates shall be considered reserve members by the order of the number of votes obtained. In the event of a tie vote, the supervisory committee shall break the tie by casting lots.
- (j) The supervisory committee shall submit a written report of the election results to the Archbishop.
- (k) An individual may vote only in the election of the parish to which he/she belongs, and may not vote in the elections of any other parish, regardless of whether he/she may have paid membership dues to that parish.
- (l) At least 15 days prior to an election, each parish shall send to the Archdiocese a certified list of paid members who are eligible to vote. Not later than 7 days before the election, the Archdiocese shall return to the Parish the certified list, with any indication of overlap or ineligibility of any voter.

SECTION 4. The Archbishop shall issue a decree pronouncing the names of the new Parish Council members. A copy of this decree shall be forwarded to His Holiness the Patriarch. The Archbishop shall follow this same procedure if the Parish Council is appointed rather than elected.

SECTION 5. All newly elected Parish Council members shall be sworn in by the Archbishop, or his authorized representative, within 14 days following the election.

SECTION 6. Transfer of power from the old to the new Parish Council shall take place under the auspices of the Archbishop or his authorized representative, on the first day of the month next following the swearing in of the new Parish Council members.

ARTICLE VIII

Between the time of election or appointment, and the first meeting of the Parish Council thereafter, all the new Parish Council members who have been elected or appointed shall take the following oath:

I do hereby affirm before God Almighty that I will not deviate from the Apostolic and Orthodox beliefs and doctrines, and that I will serve my Church and people with whole heart, sincerity and fidelity, and that I will obey the orders of our Patriarch and the Archbishop of this Archdiocese. I will perform the functions of my office according to the Constitution of the Church and the Parish Bylaws, with undivided devotion and to the benefit of my Church and its adherents.

ARTICLE IX

SECTION 1: The Parish Council shall not be involved in politics of any type. Likewise, the Parish Council shall not interfere in the spiritual and ecclesiastical matters of the Archdiocese.

SECTION 2: No Parish Council member shall join any organization that is incompatible with the faith of the Church. Members violating the provisions of this Article shall be dismissed from the Parish Council by a decision of the same.

SECTION 3: Any member of the Parish Council convicted of any felony or a crime of moral turpitude shall be dismissed from the Parish Council by a decision of the same.

SECTION 4: A member of the Parish Council shall be considered dismissed based on a decision taken by the Parish Council by a two-thirds vote under the following conditions:

(a) If a member resigns and the Parish Council accepts the resignation, or if the members insists on resignation despite the Parish Council's rejection of the resignation.

(b) If a member is absent for more than three consecutive meetings, without an acceptable excuse.

(c) If a member defaults in paying the annual pledge to the Church, unless shown that the default was due to financial difficulties or unforeseeable circumstances.

SECTION 5: The Parish Council shall be considered dissolved if more than half of its members have resigned, be it an elected or an appointed Parish Council. In this case, a new Parish Council shall be formed according to the provisions of Articles III, IV and V of these Bylaws. Should the number of the resigning members be less than half of the Parish Council, the Archbishop shall then appoint new members to replace those who have resigned. The new appointed members shall complete the remaining term of those that have resigned, after first having been duly sworn into office.

ARTICLE X

SECTION 1: Any individual or group using the Church facilities for meetings and gatherings shall at no time be permitted to conduct affairs that would be detrimental or dishonorable to the name of the Church.

SECTION 2: With the exception of Sunday school classes, no one shall be permitted the use of the Church facilities during Church services.

SECTION 3: No books, booklets, pamphlets, leaflets or any other publications of any kind shall be permitted to be distributed on the Church premises without prior consent of the Parish Council. Furthermore, no liturgical books or publications will be displayed or distributed in any Church without the prior approval of the Archbishop.

SECTION 4: The Priest, Parish Council and any other organization affiliated with the Church who wish to publish anything related to the doctrine, history, rites, laws and traditions of our Syriac Orthodox Church must have the approval of the Archbishop.

SECTION 5: All organizations affiliated with the Parish must be under the direct supervision of the Parish Council. Auxiliary organizations of the Parish may have their own rules and regulations or bylaws, provided they have been approved by a two-thirds vote of the Parish Council and ratified by the Archbishop.

ARTICLE XI

The Church shall pay an annual pledge to the Archdiocese, in an amount and at times to be determined by the Archbishop, to assist in meeting the expenses of running and maintaining the Archdiocese. The Church shall also pay an annual pledge to the Patriarchate, through the Archdiocese.

ARTICLE XII

SECTION 1. The Priest, in the performance of the following duties, is responsible directly to the Archbishop:

(a) He shall keep regular office hours in the parish house or Church office in order to be available to the parishioners.

(b) He shall conduct necessary services and celebrate the prescribed rites and other services in strict accordance with the rules and regulations of the Holy Church.

(c) He shall endeavor to encourage attendance at Church services and shall see that every member is registered in the

records of the Church.

(d) He shall form a Sunday School in which the faith is taught by qualified teachers, selecting the religious material to be used.

(e) He shall, as often as practicable, visit the homes of the members of the Church, particularly at Christmas and Easter seasons.

(f) He shall visit the sick members of the Church as soon as possible.

(g) He shall perform all the rites of the Church, and shall issue baptismal and marriage certificates as soon after the performance of same as feasible, obtaining written permission from the Archbishop prior to performing any wedding ceremony.

(h) He shall keep and preserve an official Church record of all baptisms, marriages and funerals, and shall annually forward a copy of such records to the Archdiocese.

(i) He must actively cooperate with the Parish Council in carrying out various activities designed for the spiritual, social, educational and financial progress of the parish.

(j) He shall directly supervise the activities of the youth organization of the Church and ladies auxiliary, and any other organizations affiliated with the Church.

(k) The Priest shall open all Parish Council meetings with a prayer, present his report and, at his option, he may remain for the rest of the meeting, where he may participate in the discussions, but shall have no vote. A Priest should excuse himself from a discussion of a sensitive nature that may directly impact him, such as, for example, a review of his performance or an adjustment of his remuneration and/or benefits,

SECTION 2. A Priest's initial appointment by the Archbishop to a parish shall be for a provisional period of up to two (2) years. Thereafter, the appointment shall become permanent upon the request of the Parish Council, with final approval by the Archbishop.

SECTION 3. All Priests shall be required to retire from active service in their parishes upon attaining the full retirement age set forth by the U.S. Social Security Administration. A Priest may thereafter continue active service under such terms and conditions as may be agreed to and approved by the Archbishop, in consultations with the Parish Council involved, which approval shall not be unreasonably withheld.

ARTICLE XIII

The Parish Council is charged with the following responsibilities:

SECTION 1. Social and Administrative.

(a) The Parish Council shall supervise all activities of parish institutions. It shall appoint committees, revise their composition, and effect their dissolution in writing, should they violate Parish Council instructions. It shall arbitrate all disputes that may arise among individuals administering these institutions.

(b) It shall have the right to supervise a plebiscite for the purpose of selecting the parish priest should this position become vacant. In securing the services of a properly qualified priest, the Parish Council, after having ascertained the consensus of the congregation, shall propose a nominee to the Archbishop. If the Archbishop determines the nominee eligible for the office, he shall approve the nomination and appoint him as pastor. The Parish Council shall have similar rights in the selection of a new Archbishop should this position become vacant, consistent with the Canons of the Holy Church.

(c) It shall look into all complaints presented to it by parishioners against any committee, and shall channel them to the proper authorities.

(d) It shall have the authority to dismiss any member of a committee affiliated with the Church who is not a Parish Council member, in case of misconduct, after consulting the parish priest and with the other members of the committee concerned.

(e) It shall supervise all schools affiliated with the Church.

(f) It shall prepare a comprehensive annual report within the first month of each year, setting forth its activities and accomplishments for the previous year. This report shall be submitted to the Archbishop and made available to all parishioners.

(g) At least monthly, it shall hold meetings at the Church premises. If a meeting place is not available there, the meeting can take place at any other convenient location. Other meetings can be held, as may be required, necessary or desirable. All meetings shall be called for by the president or the secretary of the Parish Council, or, in the absence of the president, by the vice president.

SECTION 2. Financial.

(a) The Parish Council shall have the right to supervise the financial management of all the institutions operating under it, including the audit of their books and annual budgets. The Parish Council shall endeavor to secure permanent income to their institutions and help them to cover their deficits.

(b) The Parish Council shall have the right to borrow monies and lease all or part of the real estate properties and lands owned by the Church according to a decision taken by it, after obtaining the written approval of the Archbishop.

(c) The Parish Council shall have the right to formulate a financial policy of its own aiming at organizing income and spending, setting up fees for spiritual services, accepting donations and contributions, providing financial aid to needy parishioners, allocating proper and adequate monthly salaries to the parish priest and providing him with appropriate dwellings, medical insurance coverage and an appropriate retirement plan.

(d) The Parish Council shall make a complete annual accounting of the income and expense of the Church for each year. Said accounting shall be posted on the bulletin Parish Council of the Church and sent to the members of the parish no later than the 15th of January of the succeeding year. A copy of the audit shall at that time also be forwarded to the Archdiocese.

(e) The Parish Council shall have the right to collect and expend funds at its disposal in accordance with formal Parish Council decisions and disbursal orders signed by the duly authorized officers, i.e. the President and the Treasurer.

(f) All funds shall be deposited in a bank or mutual fund company in the name of the Church. No funds shall be withdrawn unless decided upon by the Parish Council and authorized by the signature of the President and the Treasurer. The Parish Council shall have the right to request reports and financial aid from any organization affiliated with the Church, when needed.

SECTION 3. All meetings of the Parish Council shall be conducted, to the extent practicable, in accordance with Robert's Rules of Order.

ARTICLE XIV

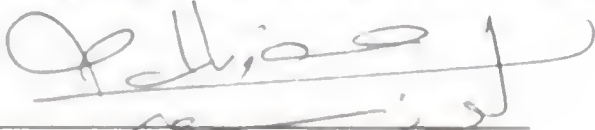
SECTION 1. These bylaws may be amended in the following manner:

Any member of the Church in good standing may propose amendments, and such proposed amendments shall be submitted in writing to the Parish Council. The Parish Council shall, at its

first regular meeting, consider the same and shall take action thereon within three months. If by a vote of two-thirds of the members of the Parish Council present approve the amendment, it shall then be submitted to the Archbishop for advice, and approval to be presented to the Archdiocesan Convention for action. If permission is granted, the amendment is presented to the next Archdiocesan Convention. If adopted by the Convention, the amendment shall be submitted formally to the Archbishop for sanctification and formal distribution to all Churches and parishes of the Archdiocese.

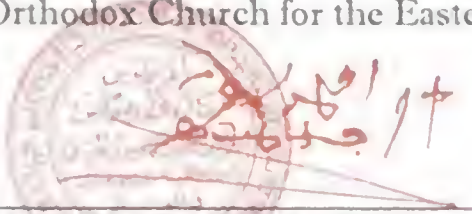
The foregoing Parish Bylaws amend and replace the Parish Bylaws unanimously adopted by the Eastern Diocese delegates to the 37th Archdiocesan Convention held in Huntington, New York on August 6, 1999. Upon adoption by the Eastern Diocese delegates at the next Archdiocesan Convention to be held in Washington D.C., in July 2012, and approval and sanction by His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim, Archbishop and Patriarchal Vicar for the Eastern United States, these Parish Bylaws shall be implemented in all parishes of the Eastern United States, superseding all other bylaws heretofore or currently in use.

The foregoing Parish Bylaws are hereby approved on this 6th day of September, 2012.



MOR CYRIL APHREM KARIM
ARCHBISHOP

The foregoing Parish Bylaws are hereby approved and sanctioned for use in the Archdiocese of the Syriac Orthodox Church for the Eastern United States, this 11th day of September, 2012.



MOR IGNATIUS ZAKKA I IWAS
PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH AND ALL THE EAST
SUPREME HEAD OF THE UNIVERSAL SYRIAN
ORTHODOX CHURCH

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